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(B.S. 5/11/60)

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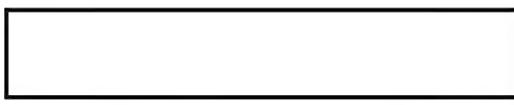


DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

Top Secret

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

SOUTH VIETNAM

There has been some increase in Communist military activity. Big Minh is making himself politically available again.

CAMBODIA

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Sharp fighting continues along Route 3.

NORTH VIETNAM

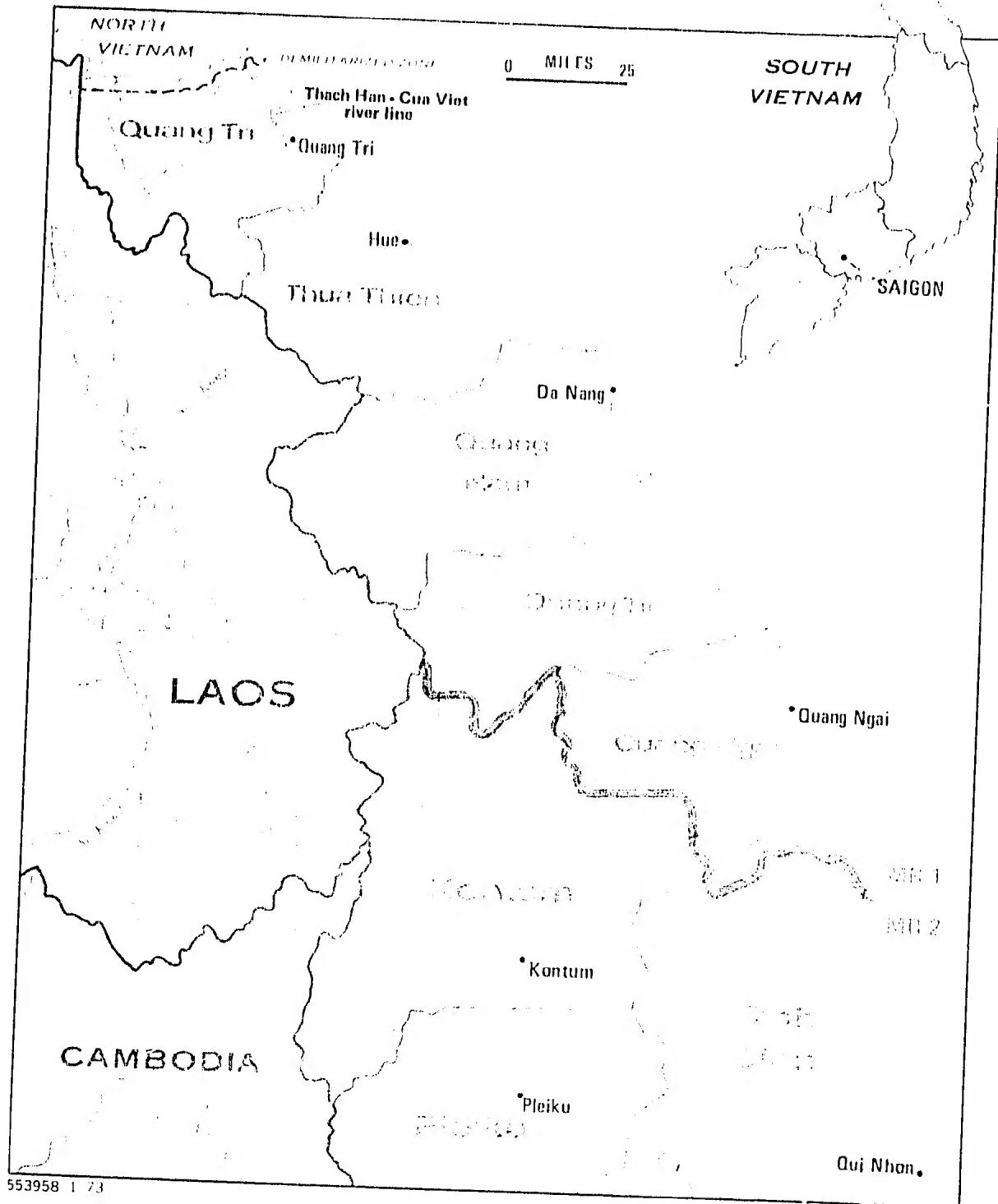
Truong Chinh's trip to Moscow does not appear to have been related to the negotiations.

LAOS

The Communists are keeping the pressure on government units along Route 13.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

there has been some increase in Communist military activity, chiefly in the lower delta. Most of the activity so far has consisted of light shellings of airfields and sabotage of roads and bridges. In the central highlands, the Communists continue their week-old harassment of government strongpoints and have closed the road between Kontum and Pleiku cities for the first time in several weeks.

Only light fighting is reported from the northern-most provinces.

Big Minh Speaks Out

Big Minh is once again signaling his availability as an alternative to President Thieu. In an interview with a Western correspondent last week arranged by his advisers, Minh asserted that he is prepared to participate actively in politics after a cease-fire. As he has in the past, Minh charged that the Thieu government, lacking popular support, will be unable to compete politically with the Communists. Minh also claimed that he and his supporters

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[Redacted]

have remained quiet because anti-government demonstrations now would play into the hands of the Communists.

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He has not been active politically since he withdrew from the 1971 presidential election after charging Thieu with rigging the contest. His reputation may in fact have been tarnished somewhat by his ineffective performance as a presidential candidate. Some of the Buddhists and other opposition elements were highly critical of his indecisiveness at the time, although some were prepared to support him and probably still prefer him to Thieu.

Minh remains the best known critic of Thieu and retains some popularity as the leader of the 1963 coup that overthrew the Diem regime. He might serve as a rallying point, for disaffected elements if Thieu's hold on the reigns of power should falter, but under the present circumstances, Minh almost certainly will not challenge Thieu directly. He does meet regularly with a group of supporters, some of whom apparently are now pushing him to take a more active role. These advisers probably hope that a peace agreement will change the political climate in South Vietnam and give them a shot at power. There is no evidence that any outside influences other than the continued prospects of a cease-fire could cause Minh to speak out.

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CAMBODIA

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The Military Situation

Sharp fighting in and around Tram Khnar on Route 3 some 25 miles south of Phnom Penh continued on 4 January. Although few details are available, late press reports indicate that government forces are holding their ground in the badly damaged village. Communist attacks in this sector reportedly have caused large numbers of villagers to flee toward Phnom Penh. Some Communist actions were carried out in the capital area on 4 January. A brief Communist rocket attack on Phnom Penh's airfield resulted in no significant damage or casualties. Communist harassing attacks against two small government positions well to the west of the city reportedly also caused only minor losses.

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NORTH VIETNAM

Truong Chinh, the number two man in the North Vietnamese hierarchy, is back in Hanoi after a two-week trip to the Soviet Union. When he left for Moscow on 16 December, it appeared that the North Vietnamese were sending one of their most authoritative spokesmen to weigh in with the Soviets at a critical point in the peace talks. The pattern of his contacts in Moscow--and also in Peking, where he made the usual stop-overs coming and going--call this judgment into question. It now appears that Chinh's trip was not primarily concerned with the negotiations.

Chinh was head of Hanoi's delegation to the ceremonies marking the anniversary of the Soviet Union's founding. During both of his Peking stop-overs, he had the customary meetings with Chou En-lai. It seems unusual, however, that during his first visit he did not see Chou in company with Le Duc Tho, who was passing through on his way to Hanoi and who had his own separate audience with the Chinese premier. When he reached Moscow, Chinh met no Soviet official of any importance during the celebration itself. Afterwards he toured the provinces briefly and talked with Suslov and D. F. Ustinov, a candidate politburo member and the party secretary who oversees the Soviet defense industry.

Had Chinh's trip been concerned mainly with the negotiations, it seems likely that he would have conferred jointly with Chou and Tho in Peking and would have seen someone besides Suslov in Moscow. Suslov carries considerable weight in the Soviet hierarchy, but there is no sign that he had been directly involved in the Vietnam problem, which is the special concern of Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgorny. Kosygin, in fact, met twice with the

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North Vietnamese ambassador while Chinh was in town. Moreover, if Chinh had a mandate dealing with the talks, there probably would have been some sign that he or someone in his delegation had checked in with the second-echelon party and foreign ministry functionaries who have been intimately concerned with the negotiations.

There is, of course, a chance that Chinh came to talk about the negotiations, but received a brushoff in Moscow. This is unlikely. Kosygin's meetings with the North Vietnamese ambassador indicate that high-ranking Soviets were not at all reluctant to do business with Vietnamese Communists on matters that probably had to do with the talks. Chinh's meeting with Suslov indicates that no personal snub was intended, and Ustinov's inclusion on the Soviet side could mean that the general subject of military assistance could have been discussed. If Chinh was not deeply involved in the talks at this sensitive point in their history, the question arises whether he has ever been so involved. It may be that the talks are the special concern of First Secretary Le Duan and Premier Pham Van Dong, among others, with Truong Chinh occupying himself elsewhere.

One other aspect of Chinh's trip remains unexplained. When his delegation arrived in Moscow, it included Chinh's politburo colleague, Hoang Van Hoan, a shadowy figure about whom very little is known. On the way back through Peking, Hoan's name was conspicuously missing from the delegation's roster. The easiest explanation is that Hoan stayed on in Moscow. One of the few known facts about Hoan is that he has had extensive dealings with the Chinese; he is not known to have had any particular experience with the Soviets. His mission this time, like others in the past, remains a mystery. [Redacted]

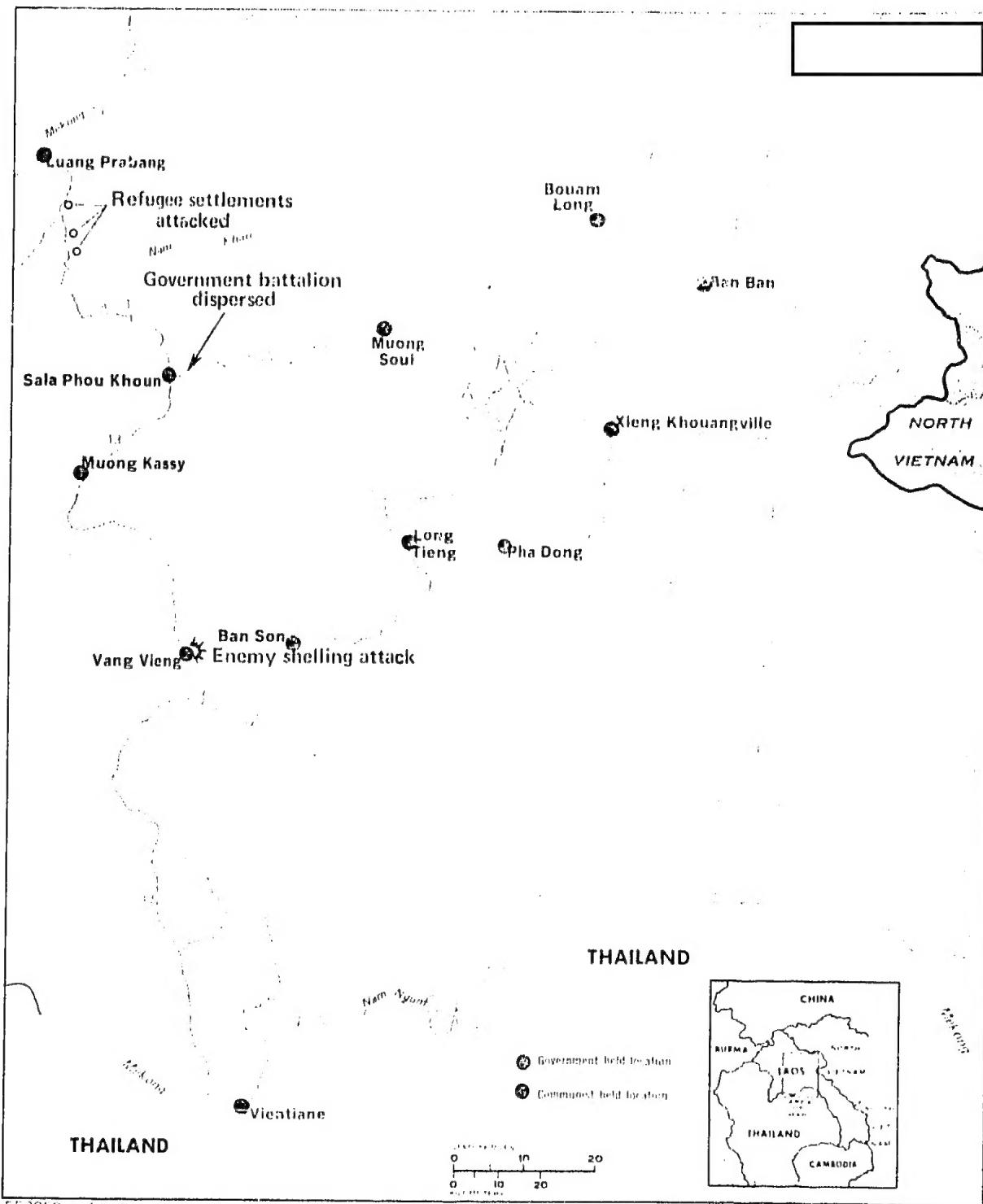
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LAOS

Communist attacks and ambushes along Route 13 between Vientiane and Luang Prabang are keeping government units off balance and disrupting planned counterattacks. On 3 January, Pathet Lao and dissident neutralist units drove Lao Army garrison troops from several refugee settlements along Route 13 south of the royal capital. Smaller Communist units are ambushing convoys and attacking government outposts near Muong Kassy and Vang Vieng. A rocket and mortar shelling against Vang Vieng on 4 January temporarily closed the airstrip at the logistic base there.

A government column quickly retook at least one of the villages south of Luang Prabang, but countermeasures farther south are foundering. An irregular battalion airlifted onto Route 7 east of Sala Phou Khoun was dispersed by Communist shelling on 2 January. Efforts to regroup the Lao Army units driven from the road junction in the initial Communist attack apparently have failed, and most of these units are filtering south toward Vang Vieng and Muong Kassy.

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